

# On the notion of ‘subject’ in Old and Middle Irish non-finite clauses

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# Introduction

- Celtic languages lack infinitives as inflectional category
- Instead, they use a nominalization, labeled as verbal noun (VN).
- VNs are abstract nouns attached to every verb stem. Syntactically they are substantive.

(1) *Ba*                      *inse*    *dún*    *epert*                      *gue*  
COP:PRET.3SG    difficult to.1PL    say:VN                      falsehood:GEN  
'It would be difficult for us to utter falsehood.' (Wb 14c 29)

# Introduction

- Another strategy to encode non-finite complements is also attested in Old and Middle Irish (Fraser 1912; Gagnepain 1963), i.e. DP *do*VN ‘lit. DP to VN’.
- VN in the dative case is merged with the preposition *do* ‘to’ and one of its arguments is placed to the left of *do* and is marked with the nominative as in (3) or accusative case.

	Agent	PRT	VN	Patient
(2) <i>Is ed comairle dorónsat</i>	<i>Craiptine</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>seinm</i>	<i>suantraige</i>
is it plan did:3pl	Craiptine	PRT	play:VN	lullaby:GEN
<i>iar sind ól</i>				
after ART drinking				

‘This is the plan they did, that Craiptine would play a lullaby after the drinking’ (ODR 368)

# Introduction

## Topic of the talk

- Investigation of the syntax of non-finite complement clauses DP *do*VN through the history of Irish
- Focus on the of DP that precedes *do*VN

## Research questions

- (Q1) What is the syntax of DP *do*VN?
- (Q2) Which are the syntactic and semantic properties exhibited by the DP?
- (Q3) Which theoretical implications do the Old and Middle Irish data have wrt. the notion of subjecthood?

# Introduction

## Proposal

- Lexicalization of subject in non-finite clauses is related to semantic tense specified on the subordinate clause; not necessarily to morphological tense.
- I would then rephrase the relation between DP and *doVN* in pragmatic terms as an aboutness relation between the DP and the predicate

# Roadmap

## 1<sup>st</sup> Part

- DP *do*VN: probing the structure
- The nature of the raised DP

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Part

- The Proposal
- Conclusion

# DP *do*VN: probing the structure

- DP *do*VN is a constituent (based on Sanfelici 2015)

## A) SENTENTIAL PRO-FORM

(3) *augtortas apstalachte inso tra [a ain fessin do suidigud i tosoch]*

‘This is the authority of the Apostle then, to put his own name at the beginning [...].’ (Wb 14b 2)

## B) APPPOSITION

(4) *do fis ind adamri-sin .i. [in grían do thecht inna coic brotu deac forculu]*

‘[Messangers came from Chaldean] to known this miracle, i.e. that the sun goes fifteen moments backwards.’ (MI 61a 13)

# DP *do*VN: probing the structure

## C) ADVERB POSITION

(5) *Indí ad-id-roillisset commór [in clóini n-ísin du tairciud doib]*

‘Those who really have deserved this, namely that this injustice would be caused to them.’ (MI 61b 17)

## D) WIDE-SCOPE OF THE FOCALIZING PARTICLE *ACHT* ‘only/except’

(6) *Co na-bad dliged remdeícsen oc-o tuistin sidi aht [intí bed tressa do fordiuclaim alaili]*

‘That there would not be a law of the Providence at their creation, except that who is stronger devours the other.’ (MI 19d 5)

## E) NEGATION

(7) *Cain Patraic immoro cen [chleirciu do marbad]. Cain Darí cen [bú do gait]. Adomnán cen [mná do marbad]*

‘The law of Patrick then: do not kill priests; the law of Dare: do not steal cows; the law of Adomnan: do not kill women.’ (Thes II 306, 27-29)



# DP *do*VN: probing the structure

- The DP is licensed within the subordinate clause

## F) NUMBER MISMATCH BETWEEN THE PREDICATE AND THE DP

(8) *Uisse [in boill dó ass ón chiunn]*

‘It is appropriate that the members grow from the head.’ (Wb 22a 17)

## G) CASE MISMATCH

(9) *dúthracmar [ar cara do thuidecht]*

‘We desire that our friend would come.’ (TBC 2730)

# DP *do*VN: probing the structure

- The DP moves to the left of *do*VN

## H) Split quantification and floating quantifiers

(10) *In doich [nech uáib do epirt inso]*

‘Is it likely that some of you would say this?’ (Wb 13c 18)

(11) *Doarchet do Israhel húathad n-dóine do chretim diib*

‘It was foretold to Israel that a small number of people among them believe.’ (Wb 4d 4)

(12) *Ní comtacht-som ni bed uilliu du thabairt foraib-som di fochaid*

‘He didn’t ask that further sorrows would be inflicted to them.’ (MI 54b 30)

(following Sportiche 1988; Shlonsky 1991)

# DP *do*VN: probing the structure

On the basis of the evidence I provided, I conclude that

- DP *do*VN is a constituent
- DP is licensed within the subordinate clause
- DP moves to the left of *do*VN

→ Next step:

(Q2) Which are the syntactic and semantic properties exhibited by the DP?

# Properties of the raised DP

- Since Keenan (1976) it has been claimed that subjects exhibit universal properties ordered on an implicational hierarchy according to

*Promotion to Subject Hierarchy* (1976: 324):

- |                    |                               |                                  |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| (i) <b>coding,</b> | (ii) <b>behavior/control,</b> | (iii) <b>semantic properties</b> |
| position, case     | deletion, movement            | agency, selectional              |
| Verb agreement     |                               | restrictions                     |

- The properties that defined subjecthood mainly focused on finite clauses. It still needs to be fully addressed whether a unitary definition of subject is maintainable in non-finite contexts and if so, which one is more suited.

# Properties of the raised DP

- The question arises as to what the role of the raised DP is

(13) *Is ed comairle dorónsat* [*Craiptine do seinm suantraige*]

‘This is the plan they did, that Craiptine would play a lullaby’ (ODR 368)

- One might think that *Craiptine* is the grammatical subject of the non-finite clause as McCloskey (1997) argued for Modern Irish:

- *Craiptine* is the agent of the predicate
- It is inflected for nominative case

→ I will show that in non-finite contexts a notion of subject exclusively based on coding and semantic properties is misleading and requires refinement

# Properties of the raised DP

- No morphological agreement with the VN: VNs inflect for case, gender, number but crucially not for voice, tense
- No thematic requirement: the raised DP can also be the patient

(14) *Naco cuala* [***Crist do chrochad do Iudaidib***]

‘Until he knew that Christ was crucified by the Jews.’ (AC §11, 3)

- No case requirement: the raised DP can be also marked with the accusative case but still controls PRO in the adjunct CP

(15) *Dorusluindset són* [***remdéicsin dæ do buith díib***] *dia n-ícc*

‘They denied this, that there would be for them the Providence of God to save them.’ (MI 90b 17)

# Properties of the raised DP

- Therefore, no case marking nor agreement nor semantic properties can be used as diagnosis for subjecthood in non-finite contexts
- The classical GB approach assumes a strict correlation between finiteness and types of subjects:
  - Finite constructions → lexical subjects
  - Non-finite constructions → PRO/NP-traces
- A multiplicity of data contradicts this generalization: complement clauses (Tamil, Sundaresan & McFadden 2009; Basque, San Martin 2004, Landau 2006); English gerunds (Reuland 1983, Pires 2007); infinitive constructions in Romance (Elordieta 1992, Mensching 2000, Herbeck 2011); and raising structures (Szabolcsi 2009).

# Properties of the raised DP

VN	Old and Middle Irish
Transitive	1) Agent <b>PRT</b> VN Patient ADV
	2) Patient <b>PRT</b> VN Agent ADV
	3) PRO Patient <b>PRT</b> VN ADV
Intransitive	4) Subject <b>PRT</b> VN ADV
	5) PRO VN ADV

- (1) *Is bás leo-som* [*in daim do thúarcuin ind arbe*]  
‘It is custom among them (for) the oxen to tread out the corn.’ (Wb 10d 6)
- (2) *Naco cuala* [*Crist do chrochad do Iudaidib*]  
‘Until he knew that Christ was crucified by the Jews.’ (AC §11, 3)
- (3) *Feib rosiacht* [*in lethnach do fhighled*]  
‘When he finished to study the page.’ (AMC 650)
- (4) *Indissid do* [*in cend do beth hi talum*]  
‘He informed him that the head was lying on the ground.’ (PH 952)
- (5) *Nipo accobor la-ssin feir* [*suide*]  
‘The man had no desire to sit down.’ (Wb 13a 20)



# On the distribution of DP *do*VN

- Classification of complement-taking predicates, according to Noonan (1985), modified for Irish by Genee (1998: ch. 5-16): Utterance (say, tell), Propositional attitude (think, deny), Knowledge (know, understand), Facultative, Deontic/commentative (must, be important), Epistemic (be possible, seem), Desiderative (want, hope), Fearing (be afraid, fear), Manipulative (cause, persuade, order), Perception (hear, see), Achievement (dare, try), Aspectual (begin, end)

# On the distribution of DP *do*VN

- Taking the temporal mismatch as a reliable diagnostic for semantic tense, Bianchi (2000) and Landau (2004) identify two groups of complement-taking predicates:
  - (i) predicates selecting the tense of the complement, thus being assigned [-T]. Complements can lack semantic tense, in this case the tense of the complement is anaphoric to that of the main clause (Borer 1989);
  - (ii) predicates not selecting the tense of the complement, thus being assigned [+T] (Bianchi 2000).

# On the distribution of DP *doVN*

- Among [−T] complement-taking predicates: facultative participant-oriented, deontic/commentative participant-oriented, causative-manipulative, direct perception, achievement and aspectual predicates.
- Among [+T] predicates: utterance, utterance-manipulative, propositional attitude, knowledge, facultative and deontic/commentative event-oriented, epistemic, desiderative, fearing, indirect perception and quantificational aspectual predicates.

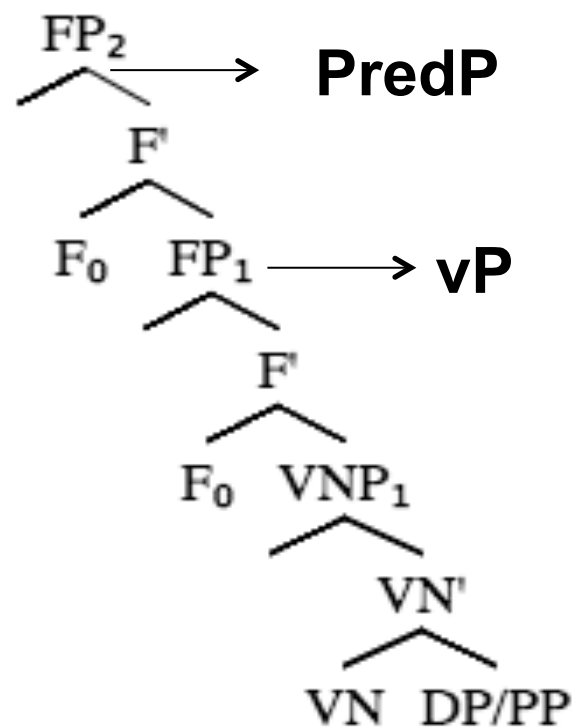
# Properties of the raised DP

Contexts	VN	Old and Middle Irish
<b>+T predicates</b>	Transitive	Agent <b>PRT</b> VN Patient ADV
		Patient <b>PRT</b> VN Agent ADV
	Intransitive	Subject <b>PRT</b> VN ADV
<b>-T predicates</b>	Transitive	PRO Patient <b>PRT</b> VN ADV
	Intransitive	PRO VN ADV

→ Non-finite complements selected by [+T] predicates allow for lexicalization of subject (Sanfelici 2014, 2015).

# The proposal

- I suggest that the structure DP *doVN* instantiates a predication [PredP] whose specifier needs to be filled. The VN is the predicate that says something about the subject.
- The DP placed before *doVN* is the subject of the predication, namely the element that refers to something about which a statement is made in the rest of the sentence, similarly though not identical to aboutness topics.

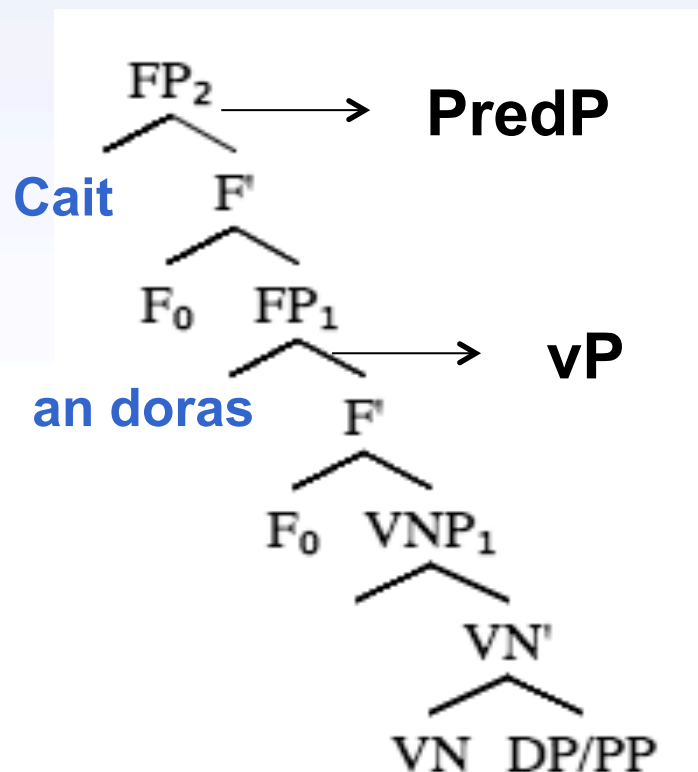


# The proposal

- Both the lexical DPs and PRO are in Spec,PredP: evidence from Northern Irish dialects

*Ba mhaith liom [Câit an doras a phéinteáil]*  
 was good with-me Kate the door PRT paint:VN

- Following Bianchi (2000), in complements specified for [-T], only PRO is licensed; in complements specified for [+T] lexical DPs can be licensed (Sanfelici 2015)



# Conclusion

- All raised DPs, independent of their case-marking and semantic roles, share the pragmatic subject feature, [+aboutness], syntactically realized in the specifier of PredP.
- Behavior and control properties and among coding properties, position, are valid diagnosis for subjecthood in non-finite contexts.
- Lexicalization of subjects is still strictly related to semantic tense, though it lacks a morphological reflex.

# Conclusion

Thank you!

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